



Fight against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights

Clive Webb

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In the uneasily shared history of Jews and blacks in America, the struggle for civil rights in the South may be the least understood episode. *Fight against Fear* is the first book to focus on Jews and African Americans in that remarkable place and time. Mindful of both communities' precarious and contradictory standings in the South, Clive Webb tells a complex story of resistance and complicity, conviction and apathy.

Webb begins by ranging over the experiences of southern Jews up to the eve of the civil rights movement—from antebellum slaveowners to refugees who fled Hitler's Europe only to arrive in the Jim Crow South. He then shows how the historical burden of ambivalence between Jews and blacks weighed on such issues as school desegregation, the white massive resistance movement, and business boycotts and sit-ins.

As many Jews grappled as never before with the ways they had become—and yet never could become—southerners, their empathy with African Americans translated into scattered, individual actions rather than any large-scale, organized alliance between the two groups. The reasons for this are clear, Webb says, once we get past the notion that the choices of the much larger, less conservative, and urban-centered Jewish populations of the North define those of all American Jews. To understand Jews in the South we must look at their particular circumstances: their small numbers and wide distribution, denominational rifts, and well-founded anxiety over defying racial and class customs set by the region's white Protestant majority.

For better or worse, we continue to define the history of Jews and blacks in America by its flash points. By setting aside emotions and shallow perceptions, *Fight against Fear* takes a substantial step toward giving these two communities the more open and evenhanded consideration their shared experiences demand.

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